DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 293 367 FL 017 344

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TITLE Miscommunication across Cultures: The Case of Marketing in Indian English. Revised.
PUB DATE May 87
NOTE 32p.; In: Languages and Communication for World Business and the Professions. Conference Proceedings; see FL 017 281.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business Communication; *Business Correspondence; Communication Problems; Contrastive Linguistics; English for Special Purposes; Higher Education; Intercultural Communication; *Language Variation; *Marketing; *North American English; Pragmatics
IDENTIFIERS *English (Indian)

ABSTRACT

A study of intercultural business communication problems compared three examples of direct marketing sales letters similar in function, format, content, and targeted recipient but originating in different cultures (India, England, and the United States) and companies. The letters were directed to a single prospective purchaser of "Who's Who" directories. Grammatical, syntactic, and rhetorical features of the English used were examined, focusing on the pragmatic inferences in the discourse and particularly on distinctive differences in the Indian English. The report gives background for the study, notes some relevant discourse features of Indian English, outlines two approaches to pragmatic understanding in interactions, and presents the results of the comparisons. Increasing awareness of different communicative strategies used by bilingual non-native speakers of English has serious implications for linguistic theory, understanding of culture-specific communicative competence, and the applicability of pragmatic theories. Both the Gricean-based theories of pragmatic inference and those that are dependent on Western nations of "logical thinking" are limited in that they apply identical approaches to both monolingual and bilingual discourse and may not be descriptively or definitionally adequate. (MSE)

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MISCOMMUNICATION ACROSS CULTURES:
THE CASE OF MARKETING IN INDIAN ENGLISH

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Earlier version of this paper presented at the 6th Annual EMU Conference on Languages and Communication for World Business and the Professions, Ann Arbor MI., May 7-10, 1987

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1. Introduction

Successful communication rests on the notion that messages achieve their intent. If the explicit purpose of the message is to generate sales, yet the originator's implicit intent (persuasion) is not achieved, marketing strategies can be said to have failed to effect desired outcomes. Historically, issues related to direct marketing texts' "intelligibility" and "acceptability" in foreign markets have been the concern of multi-national firms whose marketing strategies have required close attention to cultural divergence and problems related to equivalencies in translation. However, the present global spread and use of English[1], and concurrent recognition that marketing across cultures may be successfully accomplished using English as the language of "choice" for bridging international language barriers, may present new and different problems related to the varieties of English used by copywriters and their targeted audience.

Native English speaking (NS) recipients of written sales material prepared by non-native English speakers (NNS), while capable of overcoming some difficulties resulting from features transferred from writers' native languages, and able to derive meaning and relevance from even the most seemingly ambiguous of messages, will nontheless remain unpersuaded if the contents of texts do not conform to expected shared norms of understanding. This problem may arise in cases where cross-cultural differences in the use of English preserves semantic meaning at the potential expense of pragmatic understanding; a state of affairs which interferes with readers' ability to draw appropriate inferences from the written discourse, hence places in jeopardy NNS marketers' success in achieving sales objectives in the American market. One case in point is the example of a sales letter, written in English by a NNS, which was a direct mail-order solicitation to purchase a book published and marketed by an Indian firm.

In this paper, I examine the contents of the letter to show how pragmatic inferences contribute to total communicative content, and how these understandings may play a critical role in achieving or-conversely-failing to achieve, successful cross-cultural communication. First, using examples drawn from the primary data which illustrate the use of several linguistic features, stylistic conventions and rhetorical structures which may distinguish this variety of English (i.e., "Indian English"[2]) from other native Englishes in general (Kachru, B.,1983 a,b, 1986; Kachru, Y., 1983 a,b, in press, Sechrist, et al 1972, and others), I analyze the text to argue that culturally-bound sets of expectations and rhetorical structures can present difficulties to a NS audience because they may be perceived as a deviant application of the general principles they implicitly understand to be governing discourse. That is, I contend that when the message is in English, Native American English speakers would expect the discourse to conform to Conversational Maxims (Grice, 1975), and expect the organization and arrangement of words and phrases to be orderly and relevant (Sperber and Wilson, 1979). Based on the evidence, I claim that readers may not have these expectations fulfilled; the writer, in fact, has violated these principles in ways which suggest that his communicative behavior may have been guided by differing norms. Next, and for comparative purposes, I offer a summary of my analysis of two other sets of data: examples of direct marketing sales texts which were prepared by firms engaged in an identical enterprise, for similar purposes, and distributed (mailed) to the same audience, but were composed by NS in the United States and Great Britain, respectively. I discuss the similarities and contrasts found among the three sets of data, and the theoretical and practical implications of these differences on future research and application.

While the data is limited, the findings overall support my contention that a large part of non-semantic meaning is dependent on shared assumptions re: the norms for communicative behavior as they operate in the reader's own

society. That is, readers' understanding of texts will be guided by culturally-conditioned expectations, and the conceptual frameworks which facilitate interpretation and enable them to draw the appropriate pragmatic inferences from the text. Therefore, conceptual approaches which do not take into account cross-cultural differences may be both theoretically limiting and inadequate. While this conclusion is tentative, given the data, it is in line with-and provides further support for-previous research and authors who have addressed the non-universal applicability of Gricean Maxims or semantically related pragmatic theories (Keenan, 1976; B. Kachru, 1982; Y. Kachru 1985; Chishimba, 1982; Levinson, 1983, as examples), as well as sociolinguistic approaches which take into account interethnic differences with regard to pragmatic and discourse features (Gumperz, 1978, 1982; Tannen 1980, as only two of many examples).

Further, based on the data and personal background knowledge[3], there is reason to believe the texts are not only representative of a form of direct mail advertising which has gained wide currency among NS marketers, but-given the spread of English and marketers general willingess to adopt strategies which have previously proven successful-are likely to become the model for similar efforts across national boundaries, with implications for the communicative effectiveness of NNS' efforts. Smith (1987), for example, whose observations are representative of current observers, has noted that while the total number of non-native users of English worldwide presently outnumber the native users, for a majority of these NNS the need and/or opportunity to communicate on a global scale does not exist, nor are issues related to miscommunication *across* cultures an important concern (p. 1-2). While I concur in general with this position, the data indicates that when that need arises-as in the case of cross-cultural marketing efforts-differences in the form and organization of the English used may become problematic. If present trends continue, at issue then will be NNS' and NS' tendency to rely on

"prototypical" models of direct mail advertising copy, without taking into account the subtle ways sociolinguistic differences shape pragmatic understandings and contribute to total communicative effect, in circumstances where failure will have potential "real-world" economic consequences.

2. Description of The Data

I studied three examples of direct marketing sales letters which, in function, format, contents and targeted recipient, were similar. All three letters were written and distributed by companies engaged in the same business: the publication of "Who's Who Directories" (their generic label) in India (primary data), England and the United States. These are books designed to record-via biographical profile and/or (optionally) photograph-the background and accomplishments of persons selected for inclusion. All three letters also had a similar format and contents: each item conformed to the requisites of "sales letters"[4] in terms of layout and general presentation; each included (in their general order, but not limited to) a statement of purpose, a description of the product, and an offer to purchase. Further, the recipient of the letter was the same in all three cases.

"Who's Who" directories may/may not be titled as such, and in fact the products represented by the letters had different appelations (see attachment A). However, regardless of their title, there are three important points to be made with regard to these books' manufacture and distribution. First, the production of books which list "persons of merit" is a frequently encountered phenomena across cultures, and across varying occupations and accomplishments deemed note-worthy. Not only are there directories which list "Who's Who" in (for example) America, Western Europe, Africa, India, etc., but directories which identify persons by particular accomplishment (music, art, authors and writers, military record, public service, education, etc.). Hence,

books which fall into this class are readily identifiable as such by a wide range of people, whether they have been selected for listing, or not. Second, the process of selection is determined by the editors of the books; persons cannot "self-select" themselves as biographees. Thus, individuals selected for inclusion generally consider it as an honor. Third, persons chosen for listing are usually offered the opportunity to purchase the book in which they appear, in advance of publication. While in most cases the publishers' stated primary purpose is to produce these books as reference sources-and many indeed are found in libraries-as a rule, all individuals listed in these books are offered the opportunity to "reserve" (i.e., order) their own copy (s), at a reduced price (pre-publication), in their choice of edition(s) to be published ("grand", "deluxe", "classic", "personal", "general"), and occasionally are also provided the opportunity to purchase related items of interest (certificates, illustrated plaques, etc.).

For reasons inherent in these books' nature and objective, certain abuses by publishers have surfaced; these cannot be elaborated upon here, but are implied in the following editorial quote: "It cannot be emphasized too strongly that there is no charge or fee of any kind for biographical inclusion in the "International Who's Who in Music", nor is there any obligation to purchase copies" (Melrose Press Ltd., Cambridge England). However, while the author is aware of problems related to the quasi-legitimacy of some offers, and acknowledges that audiences' relative "sophistication" (vis-a-vis similar offers) is an important factor in predicting recipient response, the scope and aim of this paper precludes consideration of these issues in the analysis.

3. Analysis and Interpretation of the Primary Data

The term "Indian English" (IE), similar to labels such as American English or British English, is often applied to the variety of English used in what has

traditionally been called the Indian subcontinent, where-historically- British colonialization and the subsequent introduction of bilingualism in English are closely linked. However, while it is a convenient "portmanteau" in practice, and one which I have adopted, following convention, in referring to the data, it must be stated at outset that use of this term should not be construed to imply uniformity in linguistic competence or even linguistic uniformity in this variety (a caveat which applies equally to "American" and "British" English, and to my use of these terms in referencing the data in Section 4.). As B. Kachru has consistently noted (1983, 1986, and elsewhere), this geographic area is notable for its linguistic pluralism and sociolinguistic complexity; a view supported by the extensive literature on the subject (as one example, Mehrotra's illustration of the four levels of intelligibility in the case of Indian English, 1982). Thus, the several grammatical, syntactic and rhetorical features I first describe below, as preface and necessary background to my analysis-while drawn from contemporary studies which have identified these features-are only to be considered "indicative" of the variety, and certainly not exhaustive. I provide this preparatory section only to make clearer, and provide a framework for understanding, the arguments made in the following sections which analyze in detail the contents of the IE text from two differing pragmatic perspectives.

3.1 Background: Discourse Features of IE:

As B. Kachru has demonstrated in a comparative study of non-Western literature (198 b), it is the cross-cultural differences in discourse strategies that arise from the nativization of English-that is, which "entail the transfer of discoursal patterns from one's other (perhaps more dominant) linguistic code and cultural and literary traditions." (p.4)- that underlies and distinguishes IE from other varieties of English.

First, with regard to grammatical and syntactic features, transference from Indic languages may result in deviant (that is, from NS' perspective) sentence constructions. These differences are revealed in the preference of educated Indians for writing in a "learned" style characterized by its complex sentence constructions and "large-scale embeddings" (Kachru, B.,1986; 40). The complex clausal constructions found in declarative and interrogative sentences, and the formation of tag questions, for example, are traceable to this process. Other differences in IE may be the result of an extension in selection restrictions in syntax and semantics. Notable among these is the deviant use of articles, reduplication of items belonging to various word classes, regular, productive syntactic processes which give rise to typically IE collocations, and the use of resumptive pronouns. Articles are present in IE, but their distribution is erratic; they may be "missing","wrong", "intrusive" -to borrow from B. Kachru's categorizations (1986,40). Reduplication is a common feature of South Asian English as a whole, and it is used for emphasis, to indicate continuation of a process, or to create a special effect. IE collocations may be defined as South Asian on the basis of their semantic or syntactic characteristics. In one such productive syntactic process, a unit of higher rank is reduced to a lower rank, so that where a native English speaker might expect to find a clause or a nominal group, an IE user prefers a formation with modifier + head + (qualifier). As one example, "pin-drop silence" in place of "...so silent you could hear a pin drop". Finally, there is use of resumptive pronouns, as evidenced in this sentence excerpted from the data: "To have a copy of this distinguished publication, the volume in which you are included, it will be a pleasure...." (my highlighting for reference).

Second, and equally distinctive of IE, there are differences in rhetorical style. In India, as throughout South Asia, the appropriateness of these styles is determined by several factors, the most important of them native literary and cultural traditions. As Kaplan (1976, 12-15) describes the concept and

process, "the organization of paragraphs written in any language by individuals who are not native speakers of that language will be influenced by the rhetorical preferences of the native language...(thus are) likely to be shaped by cultural 'conventions' within a community of speakers". Thus, the recognition that IE may be significantly influenced by Non-Western traditions is critical to understanding the distinctiveness of such texts. With regard to these influences, on both written and verbal discourse, the literature is too extensive to cite in entirety (c.f. Kachru, B. and Y., who have written extensively on this subject; Lowenberg, 1986; Gumperz 1978, 1982, as only four examples). However, briefly summarized, the primary differences pertaining to written discourse are those related to expository form, logical structure, stylistic embellishment and punctuation/prose rhythm. The reasons for these differences are complex, but chief among them are the following (relying most heavily here on writings by Kachru B, 1983b; Pandharipande, 1982; Kaplan 1976): Indian (i.e., non-Western) systems of logic in which correct inferences are established by syllogisms whose form and number differ from those of classical logic, i.e., a "Platonic-Aristotelian" model, and which may be perceived as unwieldy and convoluted by Western standards; a notion of "proper" style in a particular context deriving from languages such as Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic, where stylistic embellishment is highly valued; the model considered "ideal" for paragraph structure and the logical pattern/progression of ideas, which has been described in the literature as "circular", in contrast to what has been called the "linear" structure of English. Finally, I end this section with a quote from Raja Rao (a well-known Indian novelist), cited by Kachru (1983b, 8) in his discussion of the rhetorical style which typfies S. Asian varieties of English. This quote aptly identifies the organizational and stylistic narrative traditions which, when imposed on a foreign language (English), results in a seemingly unending combination of sentences and a peculiar use of punctuation, hence contributing to IE' distinctiveness:

"There is no village in India.....that has not a rich sthala-purana (legendary history) of its own...(stories which are)...endless and innumerable. We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous "ats and "ons" to bother us...we tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story telling."

3.2 Pragmatic Understanding: Gricean Approach

A Grician approach to understanding how pragmatic inferences (implicatures) work to convey meaning beyond that considered a part of semantic meaning rests on shared assumptions about peoples' communicative behavior in general, and the notion that there are conversational principles which underly and govern these behaviors (1975, 78) Grice's Cooperative Principle assumes that participants in interactions will make contributions such as may be required, at the stage at which contributions occur, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which participants are involved. (Levinson 1983,101). Further, based on the assumption of the operation of the Cooperative Principle, participants' interactions will be governed by four general principles which specify what participants need to do in order to converse in a "maximally efficient, rational, and cooperative way" (p.102). These general principles Grice expressed as Conversational Maxims: the Maxim of Quantity (be sufficiently informative); the Maxim of Quality (be sincere, truthful); the Maxim of Manner (be orderly, brief, clear); the Maxim of Relation (be relevant)

The pragmatic understandings which are implicated by the Maxims are presumed to be sufficient to allow readers to make all the inferences needed-even when writer's are apparently deviating from them-and are understood by most interpreters of Grice's theories to be based on rules of conduct which are universal, regardless of cultural context. However, the universality of these conversational postulates has been disputed (Keenan,1976; Y. Kachru,

1982, among others), and in what follows I will show that claims of cultural relativity are well-founded. The linguistic features of IE briefly outlined in Section 3.1 above, which involve the processes of transference and use of nativized stylistic conventions and rhetorical structures, are evidenced in the data and diverge from readers' expectations and shared assumptions regarding communicative interaction, and what constitutes rational, cooperative, organized, and informative discourse.

The greater toleration for digression that characterizes Indian language texts, and the preferred process of clausalization (Indian languages allow a degree of complexity in single clauses not normally accomodated in English) may cause IE writers to find a way for expressing what they perceive to be related events in single sentences. The coordinator "and" is one such device for expressing relatedness:

(1) "We come back upon the correspondence resting with the inclusion of your biographical note in the forthcoming volume of our "Biography International"and thank you much indeed for your esteemed cooperation in sending to us the same.

This example (the very first sentence of the letter) illustrates the differences in grammatical and syntactic construction which may be attributed to "transference", but which may be perceived by NS readers as a violation of the Maxim of Quantity. This type of sentence construction and digressive style is found throughout the letter. As Y. Kachru (1982, 22) has observed, there is greater freedom in introducing new but related episodes in Indic discourse types, provided the "diverse threads" of the discourse are tied together in the end. As used in the letter, however, this style has the unintended effect of "coloring" the discourse in ways which deviate from non-Indic, NS readers' expectation that the writer will provide no more or less information than that required for the current purposes of the exchange.

Transference of Indian "circular" patterns of logical argumentation, which may be perceived as recursive[5], and expository forms such as that evidenced

in Hindi, for example (tolerance for digressions which link various episodes in a spiral-like structure; Y. Kachru, 1985, 14) contribute to NS readers' interpreting portions of the text as more informative than warranted, and raise questions regarding its relevancy and truthfulness, as well. A combination of non-linear progression and complexity in clausal constuction yields the following (paragraph #2); I have highlighted that information which would be considered overly informative and/or "suspicious" given its wording/ placement in the paragrah:

(2) "Since we announced to produce "Biography International", we have been receiving a large number of letters everyday (sic) from all parts of the world welcoming the new venture. Numerous requests have already been received from individuals to reserve one or more copies of the volume for their personal use and more orders are pouring in everyday" (sic)

The preference for beginning and ending an argument at roughly the same point is typical of the Indian expository style. Readers, however, may interpret it as redundant and over-abundantly informative; a perception which may induce them to question the writer's objectives and truthfulness. That is, if the largest number of letters received are "congratulatory" in content ("welcoming the new venture"), then "numerous requests" to reserve one or more copies can be inferred to make up only a portion (not all) of these letters, but the exact proportion is unspecified. Moreover, it appears that the author's intent is to persuade readers that the venture has been highly successful-but I would contend that the over-emphasis on "doing well" (large, numerous, one or more, more, pouring in) has just the opposite effect. Indeed, the overall meaning of the paragraph has the pragmatic force of that implied in the phrase "methinks the lady doth protest too much." And, therefore, the writer's veracity may be questionable. Has the writer in fact "cooperated" by producing statements that are the strongest that can be made in the situation, in the order expected (strongest, first)? I maintain there is a

disjunct between perceived surface coherence and cohesion in the discourse, and the inferences that will be drawn by NS American readers from the order and presentation of "facts"- more subtly perceived as irrelevant and out-of-order. That is, readers will be able to link "numerous requests' to "large number of letters, "individuals" to (letters) "from all parts of the world", and be able to connect the notion of "reserving" one or more copies to the previous idea of "welcoming" a venture and subsequent "orders"; the paragraph "makes sense". However, at the same time, there is confusion. For, on an implicational scale which American "consumers" might be expected to apply to the text, isn't it more important to "request" than to "welcome", "reserve" rather than "request", and actually "order", rather than "reserve"? Why these choices, why this order, why this verbiage? Readers will look for reasons, and among the potential interpretations for the writer's "flouting" of the Maxims, I contend, are that he is being overly informative, insufficiently brief and orderly, and irrelevant; hence "infelicitous" in his utterances. Together, digression and non-linear logical progression may be perceived as violations of the Maxims which-under the circumstances, and given NS' expectations-may provoke readers to draw inappropriate inferences.

Next, the text exemplifies a transfer of rhetorical style in that it combines the structure and style found in two differing IE "registers"; that found in "average" letters written by educated users of IE (which evidence post-colonnial formalism, adapted to IE needs), and what is referred to as an "administrative" register, still in use by the Indian Bureaucracy. However, these registers have been used-and used "deviantly"-in ways which may contribute to perceived violations of the Maxim of Manner and Relevance.

First, an "administrative" register is typified by its profusion of "initialisms", which creators of texts assume are familiar to readers, thus easily "de-coded". I quote from an example provided by B. Kachru (1986, 45) "H.E."s P.A has written D.O. to the A.S. P. about the question of T.A.'s".

In the letter we find (my highlighting for emphasis):

(3) Enclosed please find Special Concession Order Form for a copy of "Personal Edition"

I have interpreted this to be a "hyper-correction" on the writer's part; that is, I would contend that the writer is aware that "initialisms" might be unfavorably received, and has therefore attempted to make the letter more "acceptable" to NS American readers. However, readers might be puzzled by the need for capitalization and full identification of the "form". It is not "brief" in the way they would expect ("order form" would have sufficed) while at the same time it is far too brief, to be clear (i.e., What happened to the articles? Missing are "a"....Special...; "a" or "the"....Personal Edition). Yet this violation of Manner may simply reflect the writer's efforts to be "clear!

Again, while readers may be put off by all the intensifiers/modifyers in "reduced" position ("forthcoming volume", "considerable pride", "distinguished publication"-perceived as overly informative), we also find phrases such as:

(4) "..... high cost of production" (vs. "high production costs")

Is the author again guilty of "hyper-correction"? The difficulty with analyzing "deviances" of this kind is that they cannot be considered in isolation. It is not the one instance of deviation that presents difficulties; it is the erratic distribution of one or more linguistic constructions which are expected to be used that presents problems in interpretation. For example, in the case of articles, they may be missing (as above) or "wrong", as in-

(5) "....accepting it at a amazingly low special price"

-while at other times they are used appropriately.

Compounding issues of grammaticality, are issues related to use of idiomatic and formulaic expressions. In the data we find appropriate usage of phrases as in (2) "...orders are pouring in", followed by incorrect compounding ("every day", not everyday), and preceded by use of another conventional expression, which "sounds" anachronistic, given its context in the first

paragraph (1) "....proposed volume is now expected to run out in a couple of months time." Moreover, there are found several instances in which the writer has relied on familiar, stock expressions (that is, ones familiar to NS American recipients, and common to such advertising) to make the point: such as "We know you shouldn't be without it"; "offered...at a price as low as possible". However, and unfortunately in terms of their overall effect, what rapport they establish in one segment of the discourse is often negated by their over-use, deficient use ("Please return it duly filled in at your earliest possible") and redundant use (in addition to the above "price as low..." are found "at an amazingly low special price"; "offer at this low price"; etc). An inappropriate and inconsistent use of conventional advertising phrases, while unintended by the writer, would likely provoke an unfavorable response to the product and pose a barrier, rather than bridge, to understanding.

Another point mentioned earlier (Section 3.1) had to do with the IE preference for reduplication: for emphasis, to indicate continuation, and to create effect. But again, if brevity and clarity are expected, readers are likely to be disappointed by:

(6) "It is worth most to you because it means most to you, personally, professionally, and for your future as record of your achievement.

Putting aside for the moment another case in which an article is missing ("as...record"), which alone might qualify this sentence as unclear, I call attention to the repetition of the phrase "most to you" in the first clause, separated by "because". I maintain that readers will question the "cause and effect" implied in this clause. Why not, just as reasonably, the reverse? That is, "means most...because it is worth most....". If given an opportunity to challenge the reasoning behind statements, readers will then look for reason for repetition. And, I will guess, they will find none. It is a phrasing essentially devoid of meaning....except, perhaps...for authors who are attempting to create an "effect", to "emphasize" the point, or to link the thought with prior

and subsequent ones, to indicate continuity. This can be seen in the sentences which preceded (ex.7) and followed (ex. 8) the example above (6):

(7) "To have a copy of this distinguished publication, the volume in which you are included, it will be a pleasure to you, your family and your friends."

(8) "We know you shouldn't be without it."

Readers will note that "it" (ex 7) is ambiguous; what is pleasurable? to be included in the volume or to own it? Readers will note that this paragraph (made up of lines in ex 7, 6, 8 in that order) also is rambling (obscure), digressive (not brief and to the point), and "disorderly" ("cyclical" vs "linear" presentation of ideas). Together, these factors work to contribute to the "irrelevance" perceived in many of the ideas-even while these thoughts may be entirely "relevant" to the expressive intent of the writer.

3.2. Pragmatic Understanding: Sperber-Wilson Approach

Sperber and Wilson (1979) provide another way of looking at the pragmatic inferences which are part of the total communicative content of a text. Their approach is to analyze-within a semantic framework-the presuppostional properties of words which result from differences in the organization of truth-conditions, and the logical arrangement of words and constructions (p. 303). They suggest that focus constituents of sentences (foreground entailments) are underlied by series of logically ordered background entailments (to yield "chains of entailments")and that the former is determined by grammatical form. A "focal scale" for each sentence is produced by substituting existentially quantified variables (NP's) for constituents in the sentence, beginning with the focus constituent (information that is centrally important -foreground). What is assumed to be relevant is whatever information needs to be added to the backround (peripherally important/presuppositions) in order to obtain the foreground (Levinson 1983, 219)

Turning to the text, the "ordered entailments" presupposed to follow from a structured arrangement of words and phrases is questionable in the following example (paragraph #3) At issue is what-exactly-needs to be added to the backround presuppositions in order to obtain information that is "relevant", and make sense of the utterance:

(9) "Keeping in view the specific requirements, the publication is being brought out in two different editions i.e. "Personal Edition" and "General Edition".

Readers first will attempt to distinguish between foreground and backround in order to abstractly construct an orderly "chain of entailments". And, on the basis of syntactic form, be likely to assign greater importance to the main clause. Yet, as Sperber and Wilson point out (p.307) syntactic form does not necessarily determine the pragmatically most important point. Readers, I contend, will likely make needed substitutions only to conclude that certain important information is missing-information that is relevant, and necessary in order to determine the most important point. Let us assume that readers are able to infer the following "keeping something in mind, something is happening." They may also infer the following "because of something, something else must happen." The confusion here is due to different possible entailments, which are a result of pragmatic interpretion. Who (publisher or reader) must keep specific (important?) requirements (what requirements?) in mind, and is there reason to suppose that these are a good (specific) reason for publishing two different editions? The ""specific requirements" which are the subject of the first clause have no prior mention in the discourse, so that readers-at this point-might well fail in their efforts to deduce what those "requirements" might be, even though it is implied that readers know what they are ("keeping in view the..."). The interpretative conflicts which arise as a result of apparent inconsistencies between what is presumed to be shared information (common ground) and inferences which need to be made

based on given information (presuppositions) are not immediately, nor easily, resolvable. Readers will be hard-pressed to determine what information needs to be added to the background in order to obtain the foreground. In fact, this confusion taints the relevancy of the main clause: is the bringing out of the publication in two editions to be interpreted as personally relevant, or irrelevant information? This confusion is only partially remedied by the sentence which immediately follows:

(10) "Personal Edition" is specifically meant for listed biographies only and inspite (sic) of high cost of production, it is offered to them at a price as low as possible.

Readers now are able to make some connection between "requirements" and "listed biographies", but it is still unclear. On one hand, there seems to be implied, through what may be interpreted as over-cautious phrasing (the specific requirements) that highest cost and "General Edition" are linked; that is why recipients of the offer (listed biographees) will be interested in the Personal Edition, at "a price as low as possible". On the other hand, is it the publisher's requirement that ONLY listed biographies comprise the contents of the "personal edition"? Or that purchasers of the personal edition be among that group who have provided their "biographies"? If both are true, which requirement is the more relevant for potential purchasers? And again, entailments which would be expected to be determined by grammatical form are-practically speaking-undeterminable. The combination of IE collocations (marked by prepositional phrasing which inverts the expected header, as in "of high cost of production" instead of "high production costs) and complex clausal structure, also contribute to readers' confusion. And this confusion continues in the statement which follows these, occurring at midpoint in the text as a whole, and which the writer has seen fit to underline for emphasis:

(11) <u>You are included in the publication</u>

At this point, the recipient of the letter may well wonder why the issue of

inclusion is being raised at all, and highlighted. "Does it mean I am excluded from the General Edition? Am I included in all editions, regardless of purchase? How are persons chosen for listing in the General Edition? (are these choices in fact related to the specific requirements referred to earlier? Further, why was I, the person to whom this offer is being made, being referred to as "them"?" (ex 10 above). Is the impersonalization detected in this sentence ("meant for listed biographies", vs. "meant for you") combined with "them" implicate that there is doubt about who constitutes this group? Yet, at the end there is the clear statement: "you are included". It must be emphasized that if the *terms* of the offer, and the *conditions* for selection, are presented unclearly- or purposefully left vague-there will be grounds for critical re-evaluation of all statements made to that point and taint the interpretation of those to follow. Most importantly, however, readers may dismiss as irrelevant the very information which the writer considers most relevant.

4. Comparative Data: A Summary of the Findings

As mentioned earlier in the paper, two additional examples- similar in function and basic contents-were collected for comparative purposes. The firms were located in the United States and England; both letters are presumed by the author to have been written by NS, although the one from England can be classed as a "cross-cultural" marketing effort since it was directed to the same individual in the U.S. as the American letter. To facilitate discussion, I will refer to the sets of data using the abbreviations (IE) for the primary data, and (Eng), (Am) for the data used for comparison.

Let me begin by quoting in their entirety the first three paragraphs of the (Am) text (ex. 12), followed immediately by the first paragraph of the (Eng) text (ex. 13), and (IE) text, respectively (ex 14). This will help bring into

sharper focus the contrasts and similarities among the sets of data:

(12) "It is my pleasure to inform you that your biographical profile is scheduled for inclusion in the forthcoming 45th edition of Who's Who in America.

Enclosed is a copy of your sketch as it appears in the 44th edition.

Please proofread it carefully. Make any necessary additions and corrections. Then, even if no changes are needed, sign the sketch where indicated and return it to me within the next 15 days.

(13) "Your name has been put forward for biographical and pictorical inclusion in the Twelfth Edition of Men of Achievement, and you are respectfully invited to complete the questionnaire overleaf and return it to our editors so that they can prepare your detailed biography and send you a typescript for proofing. When you return the questionnaire, please enclose a recent black-and-white photograph (preferred size 2 1/4 inches square) for reproduction with your entry; if you do not have a suitable photograph available at the moment you may send one later but please return your questionnaire as soon as possible. To do so incurs no obligation; there is no charge or fee for inclusion.

As the contents of these paragraphs indicate, there are sharp contrasts between the (IE), and the (Am) and (Eng) sales letters. These range from average number of words used per sentence, and sentences per paragraph, to differences in the manner, relevance, kind and degree of informativeness and perceived sincerity of the writer. The above examples are exemplary of the way the letters *as a whole* seem to reflect differing sets of reader expectations regarding the norms for rational, cooperative discourse.

First, one clear difference is in the kind and order of information provided, and in what degree of information might be considered "sufficient" by the writer. Earlier, in Section 3.2, I showed that portions of the IE letter would be interpreted as overly informative for reasons having to due with complex sentence constructions, redundancy, digressiveness, and non-linear presentation of ideas. As can be seen in the above (representative) examples,

embeddings and clausal complexity are typical of the (Eng) letter (ex. 13), while these structures are lacking in the (Am) letter (ex 12). However, sentence complexity, which may implicate a violation of the maxims of Quantity (be sufficiently informative) and Manner (be brief), is only one dimension of the discourse and may be counterbalanced by evidence that the writer has adhered to other expected conversational principles. That is the case in the two letters written by NS, as I will demonstrate below. Moreover, I claim that American recipients would expect, and be familiar with,[6] the style of writing that this "British" letter exhibits; it is a style captured by the introductory phrase "Your name has been put forward", augmented by what might be considered "over-writing" by American copy-writing standards[7].

When another aspect of the Maxim of Manner, orderliness, and the Maxim of Relevance are taken into account, both letters conform to expected norms. The ideas presented in both letters proceed in an orderly way and provide specific information which is relevant to the reader. There is no recursion or redundant information. Both the (Am) and (Eng) letter begin with statements which imply readers' inclusion, then focus on instructions and the need for accuracy and verification. Then, in both, there follows background information on the company; again, with emphasis on specificity and on providing information relevant to the reader in a precise way (years in business, number of publications to date, etc.). Lastly, both letters turn to issues related to the products offered; timing, availability, cost. Unlike the (IE) letter, which leaves vague the issue of interest ("numerous requests") or availability ("Then there is a limit to the number of 'Personal Edition' which we can offer at this low price"), and is "disorderly" in its presentation (price is mentioned prior to a request for response to the offer), both (Am) and (Eng) letters are orderly and relevant in ways that indicate that the Maxims are being observed.

Specific, detailed instruction at the outset augmented by an escalating progression of reasons why the reader would be interested in the offer,

culminating in cost and ordering information, may also work to ease "presumed" skepticism on the part of recipients regarding the writer's truthfulness. Readers would already expect the information to be stated in the strongest possible way ("say as much as is required"; Levinson 106); however, the precision and confidence with which facts are presented, and the way the writers "build" upon prior information in an orderly way, add to the perceived "sincerity" of the author. Whether the writer uses imperatives and underlining to (see ex.12 above) to get readers' attention, or description as in the (Eng) version first reference to the editions available: "...will be published in two separate editions: the GRAND EDITION, hardbound with gilt lettering for general library use and the DE LUXE EDITION, individually bound in luxurious simulated leather with gold lettering (including the recipient's name) and embellishment, enclosed within a slip case (this fine edition is available only to biographees.)", quantification and specificity contribute to recipients' drawing the conclusion that the writer believes what he says. In contrast, the wording in the (IE) text's first reference to different editions is vague (see ex. 9-10), and the less purposeful and vague allusions to relevant "numbers" found in its second paragraph (ex 2) do not have the same effect.

Finally, I address the issue of ambiguity; this is perhaps the most interesting aspect of the texts, and one which all share to some degree. The ambiguity exhibited in statements can be related to readers' ability to determine what it relevant, and also to writers' intentions to observe one aspect of the Maxim of Manner (avoid ambiguity; be clear). In the (IE) letter, statements were shown to be ambiguous in ways which might confuse the reader, and cause them to ask questions which the text could not satisfy. Intriguingly, in the (Am) and (Eng) letters, some statements are also ambiguous but they are framed in such a way that readers' inferences will be in the writer's favor. A prime example are statements related to the issue of "inclusion"; or, put another way, will the recipient of the letter be listed in

volume or not? In contrast to the (IE) references to this issue, discussed previously, the wording in both (Am) and (Eng) versions appear to address this issue clearly and straightforwardly. That is, on the surface, this question is answered, and (to readers' possible relief) answered "up front". The first paragraph of the (Eng) letter calls readers' attention to the steps involved for inclusion. It is implied that once one's name has "been put forward", one merely needs to submit the proper information (questionnaire, photo) and all will go well. This idea is reinforced by the last statement, which encourages recipients to respond without "fee/obligation". Thus, there is nothing to lose by responding, and all to gain (listing!). Similarly, the (Am) letter opens with the statement that "your profile is scheduled for inclusion", followed by a series of instructions. Fully half the first page of the letter is devoted to outlining these conditions, concluding with "And only with your verification can we publish your biography with the confidence that befits such a time-honored reference classic as----" Thus, a reader might conclude that the editors are intent on accuracy; the listing itself is assured. However, and importantly, *nowhere* in these letters is it stated that readers are guaranteed to be listed. Neither a recommendation nor "scheduling" accomplishes this. Further, the attention readers will pay to the emphasized "only" in the sentence quoted, combined with the letter's generally purposeful and confident tone to that point, I contend will cause NS readers to come to a similar conclusion. That is, in spite of the fact that one possible interpretation for this sentence is that the reader's profile will be published in any case, regardless of inaccuracies (i.e., it is simply in their best interest to comply), the implication is that failure to respond will place their listing in jeopardy. If understood as a threat, it will surely compel readers to take immediate action. Hence, since either reading will be in the writer's favor, ambiguity can work as a positive strategy. The inferences made from the assumption that writers will avoid ambiguity, here drawn from the

statements cited, are that the Maxim has been observed. In sharp contrast, the inferences drawn from "You are in included in the publication" (IE letter, ex. 11), given its context, are that the writer has violated the Maxim, despite its superficial clarity and relevance. Thus, the ways ambiguity can contribute to readers' drawing appropriate inferences cannot be underestimated.

5. Conclusion

The increased awareness of different communicative strategies used by bi-lingual non-native speakers of English has serious implications for linguistic theory, our understanding of culture-specific communicative competence, and most relevantly here, the universal applicability of Gricean-based or semantically related pragmatic theories. Although communicative failure may be attributed to-and indeed provoked by-sociocultural differences, and barriers to interpretation imposed by linguistic transfer from the NNS writer's other languages, an understanding of cross-cultural miscommunication may be extended beyond an investigation of these factors to an examination of the differences in pragmatic meaning which frame, and underlie, all discourse. One might ask: How valid are Grician-based theories which consider his postulates as the norm for analyzing and interpreting pragmatic inferencing across societies, and-specifically-considers these principles to govern the speech of bilingual, and possibly multilingual speech groups? And the same question might be asked of those, like Sperber-Wilson, which are dependent on Western notions of "logical thinking". I would contend that these philosophically-based theories are both limited in that they apply identical approaches to both mono- and bilingual discourse. Further, and as I have shown, these approaches- while they are potentially useful to estimate and contrast sociolinguistic differences- may not be descriptively or definitially adequate.

The nativization process, which bridges some problems related to non-equivalency in translation and satisfies the communicative needs of NNS within their communities, may present interpretative problems for the NS. The transfer of language features from first languages to second, acquired languages is evidenced in the IE data. While the underlying reasons for the "transference" may be recognized, their existence places a burden on NS readers which increases the probability of misunderstanding. Thus, the difficulties presented by having to reconcile a flow of information which is not orderly (in the Western sense), and which appears to be comprised of syntactic constructions which-through a process of nativization-are at their surface arranged in non-logical order, tend to make questionable philosophical approaches which are dependent on Western notions of grammatical structure and their relationship to underlying presuppositions. To understand the pragmatic contributions of Grice and Sperber/Wilson as they may be applicable to evaluating the communicative content of the text, there needs to be taken into account differing and culturally-related discourse strategies and patterns. At issue is not only the extent to which these differences jeopardize mutual intelligibility, but the ways these differences work to threaten the achievement of economic objectives.

While the linguistic reality of English in its world context is that varying models may emerge, each with their own linguistic and literary norms, the way NS may react to a global situation which has resulted in more NNS than NS presents attitudinal problems that may be overlooked by foreign firms desiring to market their product in the U.S. There is great temptation for NNS to "code-switch" or in some way use, in unalloyed fashion, the idioms and expressions which play important functional roles in the language of NS. Yet, discourse which evidences a blend of historical and cultural traditions (i.e., those of both the Judeo-Christian and Asian traditions) demands a special sensibility and extended cultural awareness from marketers outside the

speech community which identifies with this variety, just as much as it demands this sensibility from readers within it. Put another way, the IE text shares with native varieties of English certain linguistic forms (represented in the letters originating from the United States and Great Britain, despite their evidential "Americaness" and "Englishness", respectively), while also retaining its discourse identity as "Indian English" (i.e., "Indianness"). As I have demonstrated, however, it is the way in which these "identities" are combined, in an attempt to address a NS target audience (American) and achieve the firm's specific purpose (sales), that may be problematic.

As I have illustrated, the IE text may present difficulties to a NS because of deviant coherence (eg, paragraph structure) as well as cohesive strategies (eg., use of tenses, linkers, lexicon) which together interfere with readers' ability to understand the writer's intent. My findings also suggest that the pragmatic inferences likely to be made by NS *familiar* with differing varieties of English (as in the case of the English example) will have less difficulty with perceived deviance. The universalism of English, while providing a tool for cross-cultural communication, also demands that we view the use of English across cultures with a new theoretical perspective; one which recognizes that linguistic realization is related to the cultural norms and "meaning system" of a society which uses English (Kachru 1983b). Assumptions that a commonly shared language is sufficient to achieve communicative intent are not substantiated by the evidence and, given the cultural relativity of pragmatic understanding, may result in failure to reach cross-cultural marketing objectives.

Traditionally, the reaction of native English speakers to "deviant" IE communication styles and rhetorical devices has not been one of acceptance or understanding. It is important to recognize, however, that the very processes which serve to make IE texts meaningful to their users (nativization of text and context) are the very ones which operate to make IE

discourse distinctive. In fact, as standards of appropriateness and acceptance develop for discourse types in South Asian English, native norms emerge. As a consequence of this acculturation, ie., the more culture-bound IE becomes, the more it grows apart from varieties familiar to American English speakers (Kachru 1986, 43). Thus, although the range of South Asian English text types is large, and may vary in keeping with the contextual and acquisitional range of their users, it may be that none of them will be completely appropriate to achieve marketing objectives in foreign markets.

Notes

1. Contemporary estimates differ, ranging from 700 million users (Lowenberg 1986) to as many as 2 billion for the number of people with some ability in English (Crystal, 1985). However, there appears to be unanimity on the on the view that "in the recorded history of mankind, there has never been a language to match the present global spread and use of English" (Smith 1987, c.f. Kachru, B. 1986; Strevens, 1982; Quirk and Widdowson, 1985)
2. The labels "South Asian", Asian English" or "Indian English" are frequently used by writers in referring to this variety (Kachru, B.,1983a; see also Gumperz, 1977; Leitner, 1983; others). Their use, as Kachru notes (1983a, 353), "suggests a parallelism with other variety-oriented terms such as 'American English' or 'British English' and implies a historical tradition and institutionalization as well as distinct formal and functional characteristics".
3. Pertinent are several years' professional experience in Marketing management and support functions, previous directly related study (MBA/mktg), and separate, ongoing interest in investigating verbal and written sales pitches/advertising language. This research has entailed the collection of several dozen examples of direct marketing sales texts.
4. Sales letters are the most common form of direct mail and are usually the centerpiece of any direct mail package. In overall format, the letters are designed to give the appearance of general or personal correspondence, and often include conventional greetings/salutations, and closures. The letters may be typed, typeset and printed, printed with a computer insert (recipient name/address) or fully computer typed. In any event, the letters serve to either make a sale directly or persuade the reader to some course of action that is designed to lead to a sale (Frank, 1986, unpublished "Dear friend: An examination of persuasive linguistic devices in direct mail-order solicitations.")

5. The Indian syllogism has five members (proposition, reason, example, application, conclusion) producing, in form, a pattern of argument which reverses the order of argument found in classical logic; the argument is stated in the first and second clauses, established by the general rule and the example in the third, and is finally proven by the virtual repetition of the first two clauses (see B. Kachru citation and example: 1983b, p20)
6. This everyday observation hardly requires defense; however, with regard to marketing efforts I note that correspondence with the Direct Marketing Association (NY, NY) confirms that recent exchange rates have encouraged new efforts by British firms to reach American markets via direct advertising media.
7. I take the risk of oversimplifying here to make the point that brevity and "punchiness" are often considered the traditional hallmarks of American advertising prose, a view supported by the didacticism (e.g., "do's and don't's) evident in advertising texts (see, for example, Bovee and Arens, 1982, on creative copywriting, p. 298-330).

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